

SERMON TEXT FOR EPIPHANY 3A

PREACHED JANUARY 22, 2017 AT ZION LUTHERAN, ENOLA PA

TEXTS: Matthew 4.12-23, Isaiah 9.1-4, Psalm 27.1, 4-9, 1 Cor 1.10-18

Location, location, location. That's the mantra of the real estate business. It's all about **location**. You may have a **great property**, but if it's not in the right **location** it's not gonna **sell**.

This **congregation**, Zion's Evangelical Lutheran Church, was established on this plot of land some 263 years ago. At that time it was most likely a **great location** from which to base a faith community – within a reasonable **walking** or **buggy-ride** distance for the inhabitants of early Enola. And so it has **remained** - even as other congregations have **moved** farther out of town, closer to newer housing complexes and shopping centers. Those kinds of conversation have certainly occurred here at Zion, but for a variety of reasons we have chosen to remain **exactly where we were planted** a quarter of a century ago.

**Jesus** seemed to understand something about location too, because instead of establishing his ministry in the big important **city** of Jerusalem – where he was likely to be **one small voice** among many others – he did so in **Capernaum**. Now Capernaum, which is located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, was at that time a town of about 1000 people. Its inhabitants relied on **farming** and **fishing** to survive. And although Jesus had already been identified as the "Son of God, with whom I am well pleased" by his father at his baptism, Jesus chose not to live in a more **affluent** place among the rich and powerful but among the **common people** – people probably very much like those he grew up with.

The main industries of this seaside town of Capernaum become important factors in Jesus' ministry. For as we read in today's gospel lesson, Jesus called as his first disciples those who were engaged in the **fishing** trade. Matthew tells us that as Jesus walked along the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon Peter and Andrew, casting a net into the sea hoping for a large day's catch. Jesus yelled out to them with an invitation to a **different** kind of **life vocation**:

fishing for **people**. And, according to Matthew, they **responded immediately** by leaving their nets and going with Jesus. Soon **after**, two other fishermen, brothers James and John, were invited by Jesus to join him, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat and followed Jesus.

I know I'm dating myself when I talk about a TV game show which ran from the 1950's to the 1970's, but perhaps you remember it too. It was *What's My Line?* The show centered on a panel of four judges the likes of Tony Randall, Kitty Carlisle, Milton Berle, Soupy Sales, Arlene Francis, and Bennett Cerf who had to determine guests' **occupations** asking only "yes" or "no" questions. In the case of famous guests, the panel was blindfolded, and the mystery guests often had to disguise their voices. Some of the mystery guests over the years included the likes of figure skater Peggy Fleming, baseball star Yogi Berra, comedian Carol Burnette, boxer Sugar Ray Leonard, TV news anchor Walter Cronkite, architect Frank Lloyd Wright, singing superstar Barbra Streisand and artist Salvador Dali.

So, imagine if **Jesus** were the mystery guest of *What's My Line*. What kinds of questions would you ask to figure out his identity, or what if the disciples were guests? What kind of responses would they give to questions such as,

Does your occupation involve working with people?

Is the work you do dangerous in any way?

Is this a regular 9-5 job?

Does your work involve any special training?

Do you work for a profit-making organization?

Is there a product associated with your work?

If you perform a service, is it for both men and women?

Each of us has a vocation or profession - even if we don't necessarily get **paid** for it. And some people would argue that you can't be a disciple of Jesus in your **paid profession** unless you are employed or called by the church. Martin Luther would – and **did** – disagree with that line of thinking. Luther saw **every profession**, be it pastor or pipe fitter, teacher or technician, maid or mother, fisherman or first aid instructor, as a **calling from God**.

Read at face value, this story could be used to tell people that their work as fishermen (or whatever their profession) is **not** a calling, and only after Jesus comes and calls them to be “fishers of people” do they really have a vocation. As I said, Luther didn’t buy this line of thinking. He felt that all professions were noble. And I would argue that that the many years that Andrew and his fellow fishermen spent working hard on the water allowed them to become successful apostles. The **qualities** that made Simon and Andrew and James and John good **fishermen** also made them excellent **fishers of people**.

And this is true of almost **every** vocation. There are parts of every job that teach us how to be a better disciple and a better witness to the Good News.

Whether it is days on end of dealing with the general public or hours crunching numbers, **everything we do has the potential to help us grow as disciples and make us better apostles**.

So, **how has your vocation been a calling to ministry?** What gifts or skills have you acquired in your day-to-day job that help you serve in the name of Christ? Where can you see God at work in your current job? Even for those who are retired or unemployed, where and how is God helping you to grow in your searching, in your volunteering, and in your free time?

One theologian put it this way: *Jesus called ordinary people right in the middle of their ordinary lives to do extraordinary things ... and he still does.* We don’t necessarily have to be “**called out**” of a profession or job to serve God. We are called to certain jobs, and they are not **all** in the church. So this text reminds us that *Jesus called ordinary people right in the middle of their ordinary lives to do extraordinary things ... and he still does.*

Your life’s work – what you get **paid** to do Monday through Friday – may or may not be rewarding or compelling, fulfilling or satisfying, well-paying or life-sustaining. I **hope** that it is, at least to a certain extent. But the far more important “job” you have in life is that of **Child of God – claimed** at your baptism, **sent out** to be God’s hands and feet and mouth and ears in the world. This “job” will not always be an easy path, but **we are not alone on our**

**journey.** We walk this path **together** – with **God** and with our **fellow disciples.** Let us be about our work. AMEN